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No. 220.

MRS. COULSON'S DAUGHTER

A One Act Play for Girls

BY

ELIZABETH GALE

Author of "Aunt Maggie's Will," "The Rag-Carpet Bee."

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SYNOPSIS—Mrs Plympton receives a note from Mrs. Coulson, an old school friend, saying that she is leaving her daughter to the care of the neighborhood. She neglects to mention, however, that she is simply taking a trip to Europe, and it is at once assumed that she is going to die. At the same time Mrs. Plympton has arranged to take a girl from the Westville Orphan Asylum to help her with her work. This orphan comes before she is expected and is mistaken for Mrs. Coulson's child who arrives in time to see how the supposed daughter of her mother is received. This helps her to choose her temporary guardian from among the villagers and leads her to offer this guardian well deserved assistance.

The situation offers opportunities for humor and the play closes with the happy disposal of the orphan.

LIST OF CHARACTERS.

ARABELLA BEANS..... *A busy woman who owes a mortgage.*

SUSIE CRAIN.....*Who is always in doubt.*

MINNIE HAYS.....*A very positive person.*

LIZZIE LAND.....*A plain country woman.*

MRS. LITTLE.....*A stout lady.*

MRS. PLYMPTON....*A woman of great importance whose husband's people gave the name to the village.*

THE ORPHAN.....*Who tries to speak for herself*

CAROLYN.
GRACE.
RUTH.
MYRTLE. } *Four girls from the city.*

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MRS. COULSON'S DAUGHTER

THE SCENE is the sitting room in Mrs. Bean's home. It is exceedingly neat but very scantily furnished. A few brilliant pictures decorate the walls and advertise *Starlight Soap, Barton's Ball Blueing, Putnam's Ploughs,* etc. Rag carpet covers the floor, a table is pushed against the right hand wall, a cupboard against the wall opposite, a sewing machine stands at the extreme left of the foreground and chairs are arranged primly about the room. At the rear of the room, to the right, is a door which opens out on the porch and another door at the left leads into the kitchen.

Arabella Beans is discovered sewing furiously on the machine.

ARABELLA. (*as she finishes the garment she is working on and throws it over the back of a near-by chair*) There! That's finished, all but the buttons and buttonholes, and it means a whole half dollar paid off that mortgage, and maybe, if I work like a steam engine, I can get the other one done. (*she picks up another piece of work and begins to sew*) Land knows I need to do all I can. (*a rap at the door*) Come in.

(*Enter* SUSIE CRAIN.)

SUSIE. Why, how d' do, Arabella. You ain't workin', are you?

ARABELLA. (*crisply*) Of course I'm workin'. With a mortgage to pay off, interest and taxes coming due and no one to help me out, I'd be plumb crazy if I didn't work.

SUSIE. (*limply dragging a chair forward and seating herself*) W-well, I don't know. When all this company's comin'——

ARABELLA. Can't stop for company. I didn't ask 'em here anyway.

SUSIE. You didn't——

ARABELLA. (*turning about and for the first time giving her full attention to her guest*) No, I didn't. But since you've just come home from a visit perhaps you don't know all about it yet. (SUSIE *shakes her head*) It was this way. Mrs. Plympton got a letter yesterday which she says concerns the whole neighborhood, so, of course, they all had to get together to hear it and since I couldn't leave my work they're comin' here. That's why I'm havin' a party. (*turning back to her machine*) There ain't no refreshments in it either.

SUSIE. I think I hear some one comin' now.

(*After rapping briskly* LIZZIE LAND *and* MINNIE HAYES *come bustling in.*)

ARABELLA. How d' do, folks. Come right in and make yourselves at home. Don't mind me. I can't stop work.

LIZZIE. How d' do, everybody.

MINNIE. How d' do Arabella. Hello, Susie. I knew you'd be here, and of course I know that Mrs. Plympton won't be along for half an hour yet. She's as slow as a turtle. But I ain't curious about her letter. I guess I know what's in it.

(*Enter* MRS. LITTLE *without the formality of a rap.*)

MRS. LITTLE. Whew! Such a hill! I'm most worn out! (*she sinks into the nearest chair and fans herself with a handkerchief*)

ARABELLA. (*without stopping her work*) How d' do, Mrs. Little.

MRS. LITTLE. Whew! Whew!

MINNIE. (*confidently*) You'll git your breath back presently. I knew you'd be comin' along right after us. How are you?

MRS. LITTLE. Very poorly. Whew!

MINNIE. (*aside*) You look it. (*to* SUSIE) I suppose you've heard about this letter Mrs. Plympton got yesterday? I'm sure I don't care what's in it but she wanted us all to hear it so I came along with the rest. (*impatiently*) I wish she'd hurry up. Not that I want to hear the letter, but I would like to git home to mend Jim's pants. My land! he ain't got a thing that's fit to wear.

MRS. LITTLE. (*peeking through the crack of the door*) Here she comes this minute.

(*There is a short expectant hush during which* ARABELLA *continues to sew and the others surreptitiously do a little primping.*)

(*A rap at the door.*)

ARABELLA.
MINNIE. } Come in.

ALL. (*as* MRS. PLYMPTON *enters*) How d' do, Mrs. Plympton.

MRS. PLYMPTON. Good afternoon, ladies. How d' do, Mrs. Beans. You aren't busy, are you?

ARABELLIA. (*turning back to the machine*) Yes, of course I'm busy. I always am—busy as a bee in a tar barrel. But don't mind me. Go right on with

your meetin'. (*They all exchange looks of disapproval*) I am goin' to stop the machine in a minute anyway and jest do hand work.

MINNIE. Yes, let us go right on and get through.

MRS. PLYMPTON. (*drawing a chair forward and seating herself with an air of importance*) We will wait for Mrs. Beans.

(ALL *of the others draw their chairs eagerly about her, but* ARABELLA *sits through the whole scene a little aloof before her machine.*)

LIZZIE. I hope you didn't forget the letter.

MRS. PLYMPTON. Certainly not. I never forget.

MINNIE. Got it in your pocket, have you?

MRS. PLYMPTON. I have it in my purse.

ARABELLA. (*closing the machine*) There! I've finished 'em all but the hand work. Now let's hear what there is to hear.

MRS. PLYMPTON. You will all give me your attention, then?

ARABELLA. Uhum.

(ALL *but* ARABELLA *hitch their chairs a little nearer* MRS. PLYMPTON *and she brings out a rather small, very ladylike looking envelope.*)

MRS. PLYMPTON. (*with provoking slowness*) It is the queerest letter you ever saw, and when I first opened it——

MINNIE. (*reaching for it*) Let me see.

MRS. PLYMPTON. (*snatching the letter away from her*) I will read it presently, but I think I ought to prepare you first for the shock——

MRS. LITTLE. (*throwing up her hands*) Another shock!

MINNIE. Never mind the *shock*, go on with the letter.

MRS. PLYMPTON. I must tell you first that it is from Lena Simpson—that was. You all remember her.

LIZZIE. Yes, of course. Me and her went to school together.

SUSIE. And I used to think she was sort of pretty, too.

MRS. LITTLE. She married that rich man from the city, didn't she? And he died and left her well off.

MRS. PLYMPTON. That's what folks *said,* but this don't sound like he was very well off. Jest listen now. The envelope is addressed to me but this is the letter. (*reading.*)

My dearest old friends:

MINNIE. That sounds like she wanted something.

MRS. PLYMPTON. (*continuing to read*) I am leaving my daughter Carolyn in charge of the neighhood, feeling that she will be quite safe there when I am gone. She will choose one of you for her special guardian but I am sure you will all be good to her. I can write no more now. Lovingly yours, Lena Simpson Coulson.

MINNIE. Lena Simpson's daughter left on the town!

SUSIE. W-well I never!

ARABELLA. My, my, though! Ain't that too bad.

LIZZIE. I jest can't believe it all at once.

MRS. LITTLE. I call it pretty cool, the way she packs the child off to us. A body'd think we was havin' a donation party. Didn't her father have no folks?

MRS. PLYMPTON. I am sure *I* don't know.

MRS. LITTLE. That jest beats everything I ever heard of—leavin' her daughter to us to support.

And she's offered to us like she was some sort of a prize package.

MRS. PLYMPTON. But you haven't heard all. The letter came last night but this noon I got this telegram. (*reading the telegram*) Lena Simpson's daughter will arrive at Plympton on the 4.40 train. (*signed*) S. S. W.

LIZZIE. Who is S. S. W?

MRS. PLYMPTON. I am sure *I* don't know.

MRS. LITTLE. Humph!

MINNIE. It certainly is a mighty queer piece of business and I want to know who's goin' to take her.

MRS. LITTLE. Well I *can't* do it; I am jest about worn out now.

MINNIE. And I won't. Sakes alive! it is all I can do to make ends meet now without another mouth comin' in between.

LIZZIE. That's jest how I feel.

ARABELLA. (*thoughtfully*) And I've got my mortgage to pay off.

MRS. PLYMPTON. And worse still, I have just ordered a girl from the Westville Orphanage to help me through the summer and she is coming to-morrow, so, of course *I* can't think of taking her.

SUSIE. W-well, I don't know, but it seems to me that we ain't goin' to have much choice in the matter. The letter says the girl will choose her own guardian.

MINNIE. Well, she won't choose *me*.

LIZZIE. Nor *me*.

MRS. LITTLE. Nor *me*.

ARABELLA. Who's goin' to the train to meet her?

MINNIE. She ain't goin' to be met.

ARABELLA. It's a long lonely walk and it's goin' to be sort of discouragin' findin' no one home till she gits here—and her jest loosin' her mother and all.

MINNIE. *Fiddlesticks! Lonely! Humph!* A woman like you with a mortgage to pay off ought not to have time to talk such stuff and nonsense.

MRS. PLYMPTON. I'll tell you what we can do. We can all take our chairs out into the orchard and from there we can see the train come in and watch her comin' most of the way from the station here.

LIZZIE. That will be fine.

MRS. LITTLE. I don't care if I do.

MINNIE. It is most time for the train now, so come on. This way through the kitchen. It's shortest.

(*She leads the way carrying her chair and they all follow her with theirs,* ARABELLA *coming last.*)

ARABELLA. (*gathering up her sewing*) Well, I may as well go, too. I don't want to miss nothin' if I am busy.

MINNIE. (*from the kitchen*) Hurry up. I hear the train whistlin'.

(*As* ARABELLA *goes out she very carefully closes the door after her and as soon as the commotion in the kitchen ceases and the "meetin'" is well on its way to the orchard, the door leading to the porch slowly opens and a prettily dressed young woman peeps in and then enters.*)

CAROLYN. Hurry up, girls. Come on in. (*advancing into the room*) No one seems to be at home either.

(*Enter* GRACE, RUTH, *and* MYRTLE.)

GRACE. It is a real live deserted village, isn't it? Every house closed but this.

RUTH. I am glad they didn't lock us out entirely. I am *so* hungry, and maybe if we look around we can find something to eat. (*she begins a tour of inspection.*)

MYRTLE. It doesn't look promising.

CAROLYN. No, it is the most starved-looking place I ever saw. There isn't even a chair to sit on.

RUTH. (*at the cupboard*) Oh, here is a ginger-cake! And pickles!

GRACE. Oh, goodie!

MYRTLE. Anything else?

CAROLYN. Bring them over to the table and we will eat them right up.

MYRTLE. (*at the kitchen door*) Oh, here is the kitchen. Wait until you see what I can find out here. (*exit*)

CAROLYN. (*at the cupboard*) Here is a jar of jam. Oh, girls, we are going to have a feast!

GRACE. (*carrying a pile of plates from the cupboard to the table*) And here are some plates to eat it from.

MYRTLE. (*coming in from the kitchen with a pan of milk*) See what I have found.

GRACE. Oo-o-o-o! Doesn't that look good!

CAROLYN. Um-m-m-m, I am so thirsty.

RUTH. I feel like a pussy cat. I want to put my nose right into the pan.

MYRTLE. Oo-oo-oo, don't say another word or you will make me laugh and spill it. (*setting it on the table*) There!

GRACE. (*bringing them from the pantry*) Here are some cups to drink it from and now let us begin. (*she dips out the milk and passes it around*)

CAROLYN. I can't find any silver so we will have to use our fingers for the rest. (*putting her hand into the jar*) Here Grace, have a pickle.

MYRTLE. (*breaking off a piece of ginger-bread*)

Just make yourselves at home and help yourselves to ginger-bread. (*the girls all help themselves and begin to eat.*)

RUTH. My! but this is good!

GRACE. They're the best pickles I ever tasted.

CAROLYN. And isn't the ginger-bread simply magnificent!

RUTH. *Mm-mm-m-m.* I'm so glad I came.

MYRTLE. So am I, but I wish I had something to sit on. I guess I'll perch on the machine.

CAROLYN. By-the-way, where do you suppose we are?

RUTH. The last sign post I saw said: TEN MILES TO PLYMPTON. But we rode for some time after that before our motor broke down.

GRACE. And we have walked about *fifteen* miles since then.

CAROLYN. I simply *must* get to Plympton to-night if I have to fly there.

MYRTLE. And are you going to leave your automobile out there in the road all night?

CAROLYN. Why not? I am not afraid anyone will steal it. It is too heavy to carry and I have proved to you all that it *won't* run.

(*They all laugh.*)

MYRTLE. (*glancing about at the pictures*) What a collection of art treasures! Look. Did you ever see anything like it? This alone is worth a day's journey to see. (*jumping down from the machine and approaching one of the pictures with appropriate jesture*) Behold the gracious lady who makes this glorious soap! And all through the tedious process she never got a spot of grease on her gown, soiled her perfect hands or ruffled her beautiful hair. Only five cents a cake. Sold at every reputable grocery store.

(*coming back to the machine*) I am too hungry to tell you the rest just now.

GRACE. I wish there were fewer pictures and some chairs. The people who live here must all have wooden legs or they couldn't stand up all of the time. I am going to sit on the floor. (*sitting and placing her cup of milk on the floor beside her*) Oh, girls, this is great! Why didn't we think of it before! Combination chair and table.

RUTH. (*squatting beside her*) This is sort of comfy.

MYRTLE. I am satisfied here.

CAROLYN. (*sitting on the edge of the table*) This suits me. Say, girls, *isn't* this good ginger-cake!

ALL. *Umm-mm-m-m!*

GRACE. But I am getting to have a dreadfully *lost* sort of feeling. Where *do* you suppose we are?

CAROLYN. It *is* lonely here.

RUTH. And suppose the wooden-legged people come home and—and——

MYRTLE. (*getting down from the machine*) Oh, stop. You make me feel *spooky.*

GRACE. (*getting up from the floor*) Let's go. Come on, I am getting scared.

CAROLYN. Shs-sh-sh. I hear a noise in the kitchen.

(*They all scamper to the outer door and* ARABELLA *followed by the others, appears at the door.*)

ARABELLA. Well, I never! (*advancing toward the table*) My fresh ginger-bread! My best pickles and the jar of jam I have been saving for the last six months. *And* the cream all gone off this morning's milk, and two of my best cups on the floor. I'll *never* get that mortgage paid off.

GRACE. I am so sorry.

RUTH. We were all so hungry——

MYRTLE. And it looked so good we just couldn't help it.

CAROLYN. (*stepping forward*) And I think I ate most of it.

ARABELLA. I guess you all had pretty good appetites.

(*A rap at the door.*)

ARABELLA.
MINNIE. } Come in!

(*The door opens and the orphan, dressed in black and with a big bundle in her arms, enters.*)

THE ORPHAN. Please, ma'am——

MINNIE. (*interrupting*) Well, it's time you got here. We've been waitin' for you for the last half hour. You are the slowest walker I ever seen.

THE ORPHAN. Please m'am, I was to say——

MRS. PLYMPTON. Don't stand there half outside the door and try to talk. Come right into the room. (*having brought her chair back with her she now sits down and* MRS. LITTLE, LIZZIE *and* SUSIE *do the same*) You don't look much like your mother, I must say.

THE ORPHAN. But, ma'am——

MRS. LITTLE. Well, I don't know. Lena always was sort of skinny.

MRS. PLYMPTON. (*to* THE ORPHAN) Turn around and let us see if you are as queer looking from all sides as you are from this.

MINNIE. (*as the girl slowly revolves*) Lena surely didn't send us no parlor ornament. (*finger-*

ing her dress) They made your clothes out of mighty poor stuff, too.

RUTH. (*aside to* GRACE) They'll be doing that to us in a minute. Let us go while we have the chance. (*she tries to slip out of the door*)

ARABELLA. Come back here. I have a few questions to ask you about pickles and ginger-bread.

(RUTH *meekly obeys.*)

LIZZIE. (*to* THE ORPHAN) What can you do, can you cook?

THE ORPHAN. Nope. But, ma'am——

MRS. LITTLE. Did your ma teach you to sew?

THE ORPHAN. Nope. But, ma'am——

MRS. PLYMPTON. Can you scrub? Now no *nopes* and *but ma'ms* to me. Just answer my questions.

THE ORPHAN. N-n-no, ma'am. But, ma'am——

MINNIE. My sakes alive! she can't do nothin'! Brought up like a lady and looks like a scarecrow!

LIZZIE. She is too much like a scarecrow for me to have around.

MRS. LITTLE. Me, either.

MRS. PLYMPTON. As I told you before it is simply out of the question for me to take her.

MINNIE. And as *I* told you before—*I won't.*

ARABELLA. But what are you goin' to do with her? You can't turn her out in the fields to graze.

MINNIE. I don't know, but I can't take her.

LIZZIE. Nor I.

MRS. PLYMPTON. Nor I.

MRS. LITTLE. Nor I.

SUSIE. Nor I.

MINNIE. It is the cheekiest thing I ever heard of, turning her loose on us like this.

ARABELLA. We might take turn about——

ALL. No, indeed, I guess not.

MRS. PLYMPTON. We might send her to the Westville Orphanage.

ARABELLA. (*slowly*) W-well, I don't know what will ever become of that mortgage, but I can't see Lena's girl come to that, so I guess I'll have to take her. (*kindly*) Jest set down your bundle, child, and try to make believe you'r glad you've come to Plympton.

CAROLYN. *Plympton!* Is this Plympton?

ARABELLA. (*starting*) Oh, I forgot about you. Yes, of course it's Plympton. Where else would it be?

CAROLYN. And who is this child? Would you mind explaining?

ARABELLA. She is the daughter of an old friend who has just died and willed her to us and I am going to adopt her. I don't know how I'll ever pay off that mortgage but I guess a human being is of more account than a mortgage any day.

MRS. PLYMPTON. (*pompously*) Let me explain. Yesterday I received this letter (*handing it and the telegram to* CAROLYN) and at noon to-day I received the telegram, and just now, as you have seen, the girl arrived.

CAROLYN. (*glancing up from the letter and pointing to the orphan*) So you think that is Carolyn Coulson?

MINNIE. Who else could it be?

CAROLYN. I am sure I don't know, but *I* am Lena Simpson Coulson's daughter and my mother is not dead but has just gone on a trip to Europe for the summer. In her hasty note she forgot to mention it —that is just like dear little mother. And I did not come on the four-forty train this afternoon because it was such a beautiful day I thought it would be nice to motor out. And it was—but our car broke down (*with a vague jesture*) somewhere out there.

MRS. PLYMPTON. (*rising to the occasion*) Why, Miss Coulson, I am so glad to know you. I hope you will come right home with me and make me a good long visit.

CAROLYN. (*stiffly*) Thank you.

MINNIE. I would be proud to have you come to see me, Miss Coulson. My spare room is all ready for company.

MRS. LITTLE. Mine too, and I live nearer than Minnie does.

LIZZIE. Do come and see me.

SUSIE. W-well, I don't know, but maybe you would like to come to my house.

CAROLYN. Oh, thank you all very much, but you see I have my friends with me and——

MRS. PLYMPTON. (*grandly*) I have plenty of room for you all.

CAROLYN. I thank you again but I have chosen my guardian and think I should stay with her. (*laying her hand on* ARABELLA'S *shoulder*) If you will let me board with you this summer I wouldn't be surprised if we could just about pay off that mortgage.

ARABELLA. What, you! *Me!* The mortgage! And I was so mad at you for eatin' up my gingerbread.

MINNIE. But who are you then since you ain't Miss Coulson?

THE ORPHAN. (*with an air of great relief*) But, ma'am, please, ma'am, I'm Maggie McCabe. And I was to say, ma'am, that the asylum is so chock full could I please come to-day, ma'am, instead of to-morrow. And——

ARABELLA. I guess you please could since you are here.

MRS. PLYMPTON. Then you are my orphan, the one I ordered.

ARABELLA. No, she ain't. She's mine now. I've adopted her and after all that fuss I am going to keep her.

MYRTLE. (*stepping forward with* GRACE *and* RUTH) And if you would adopt us until Carolyn gets her car fixed we would be very much obliged to you.

CAROLYN. If you wait for that, girls, I believe you are here for a very long and happy summer.

THE ORPHAN. And please, m'am, I was to say, if you want any more orphans you can have 'em.

CURTAIN.

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